

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

---

Volume 33 | Issue 3

Article 8

---

7-1-2016

## William E. Mann, GOD, MODALITY, AND MORALITY

William F. Vallicella

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Vallicella, William F. (2016) "William E. Mann, GOD, MODALITY, AND MORALITY;" *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201633368

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol33/iss3/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.



created these processes to be generally reliable and so you'll think the broader process is more relevant. If you have a low prior in God's existence, you'll think our religious beliefs are likely false and so you'll think the narrower process is more relevant. They conclude, "it seems that both theists and nontheists reach reasonable conclusions and are justified in holding them" (199).

Although I agree that the generality problem is a worry for externalist theories of justification, I think it is less worrisome when we're simply interested in evidence of unreliability as a source of defeat, which is what debunking arguments try to give. For the latter, we want to take into account any evidence about the causes and circumstances of the use of the belief-forming process. Even if process P is generally reliable concerning my visual judgments, if I get evidence that it isn't reliable concerning my color judgments, then I thereby obtain good reason to doubt my color judgments. So, the narrower belief-forming process is relevant to whether belief is defeated, even if we grant that the reliability of the broader belief-forming process is sufficient for *prima facie* justification.

Despite these shortcomings in their discussion of debunking arguments, this is a very good book that I recommend to all interested in the cognitive science of religion. It doesn't end the discussion of whether the cognitive underpinnings of theistic arguments debunk those arguments, but it is undoubtedly an excellent place to start.

*God, Modality, and Morality*, by William E. Mann. Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 369. \$74.00 (hardcover).

WILLIAM F. VALLICELLA

This is a book philosophers of religion will want on their shelves. It collects sixteen of William E. Mann's previously published papers and includes "Omnipresence, Hiddenness, and Mysticism," written for this volume. These influential papers combine analytic precision with historical erudition: in many places Mann works directly from the classical texts and supplies his own translations. Mann ranges masterfully over a wealth of topics from the highly abstract (divine simplicity, aseity, sovereignty, immutability, omnipresence) to the deeply existential (mysticism, divine love, human love and lust, guilt, lying, piety, hope). As the title suggests, the essays are grouped under three heads, God, Modality, and Morality.

A somewhat off-putting feature of some of these essays is their rambling and diffuse character. In this hyperkinetic age it is a good writerly maxim to state one's thesis succinctly at the outset and sketch one's overall



argument before plunging into the dialectic. Mann typically just plunges in. "The Guilty Mind," for example, begins by juxtaposing the Matthew 5:28 commandment against adultery in the heart with the principle of *mens rea* from the criminal law. From there we move to a certain view of intentional action ascribed to a character Mann has invented. This is then followed with rich and penetrating discussions of lying, strict criminal liability, the doctrine of Double Effect (307–309) and other topics illustrated with a half-dozen or so further made-up characters. One realizes one is in the presence of a fertile mind grappling seriously with difficult material, but after a couple of dense pages, one asks oneself: where is this going? What is the thesis? Why is the author making me work so hard? Some of us need to evaluate what we study to see if we should take it on board; this is made difficult if the thesis or theses are not clear.

I had a similar difficulty with the discussion of love in "Theism and the Foundations of Ethics."

Central to Christian moral teaching are the two greatest commandments. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:35–40). Mann raises the question whether love can be reasonably commanded. Love is an emotion or feeling. As such it is not under the control of the will. And yet we are commanded to love God and neighbor. How is this possible? An action can be commanded, but love is not an action. If love can be commanded, then love is an action, something I can will myself to do; love is not an action, not something I can will myself to do, but an emotional response; ergo, love cannot be commanded.

One way around the difficulty is by reinterpreting what is meant by "love." While I cannot will to love you, I can will to act benevolently toward you. And while it makes no sense to command love, it does make sense to command benevolent behavior. "You ought to love her" makes no sense; but "You ought to act as if you love her" does make sense. There cannot be a duty to love, but there might be a duty to do the sorts of things to and for a person that one would do without a sense of duty if one were to love her. One idea, then, is to construe "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" as "Thou shalt act towards everyone as one acts toward those few whom one loves" or perhaps "Thou shalt act toward one's neighbor as if one loved him." The above is essentially Kant's view as Mann reports it (236ff.).

As for love of God, to love God with one's whole heart, mind, and soul is to act as if one loves God with one's whole heart, mind, and soul. But how does one do that? One way is by acting as if one loves one's neighbor as oneself. So far, so good. Mann, however, rejects this minimalist account as he calls it. And then the discussion becomes murky for this reviewer despite his having read it four or five times carefully. The murkiness is not alleviated by a segue into a rich and detailed discussion of *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

"Modality, Morality, and God" is written in the same meandering style but is much easier to follow. It also has the virtue of epitomizing the entire collection of essays. Its topic is the familiar Euthyphro dilemma: Does God love right actions because they are right, or are they right because God loves them? On the first horn, God is reduced to a mere spokesman for the moral order rather than its source, with negative consequences for the divine sovereignty. On the second horn, the autonomy of the moral order is compromised and made hostage to divine arbitrariness. If the morally obligatory is such because God commands it, then, were God to command injustice, it would be morally obligatory. And if God were to love injustice that would surely not give us a moral reason for loving it. Having set up the problem, Mann should have stated his solution and then explained it. Instead, he makes us slog through his dialectic. Mann's solution is built on the notion that with respect to necessary truths and absolute values God is not free to will otherwise than he wills. In this way the second horn is avoided. But how can God be sovereign over the conceptual and moral orders if he cannot will otherwise than he wills? If I understand the solution, it is that sovereignty is maintained and the first horn is avoided if the constraint on divine freedom is internal to God as it would be if "absolute values are the expression of that [God's] rational autonomy" (168). Thus God is not free as possessing the liberty of indifference with respect to necessary truths and absolute values, but he is free as the rationally autonomous creative source of necessary truths and absolute values. Thus God is the source of necessary truths and absolute values, not their admirer. Does Mann's solution require the doctrine of divine simplicity? I don't think so. But it is consistent with it. If knowing and willing are identical in God, then the truth value and modal status of necessary truths cannot be otherwise in which case God cannot will them to be otherwise.

*Divine Simplicity.* At the center of Mann's approach to God is the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS). But as Mann wryly observes, "The DDS is not the sort of doctrine that commands everyone's immediate assent" (260). It is no surprise then that the articulation, defense, and application of the doctrine is a recurrent theme of most of the first thirteen essays. Since DDS is the organizing theme of the collection, a critical look at Mann's defense of it is in order.

One of the entailments of the classical doctrine of divine simplicity is that God is what he has (Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 10). Thus God has omniscience by being (identical to) omniscience. And similarly for the other divine attributes. The Platonic flavor of this is unmistakable. God is not an all-knowing being, but all-knowing-ness itself; not a good being, or even a maximally good being, but Goodness itself; not a wise being or the wisest of beings, but Wisdom itself. Neither is God a being among beings, an *ens* among *entia*, but *ipsum esse subsistens*, self-subsistent Being. To our ordinary way of thinking this sounds like so much nonsense: how could anything be identical to its attributes? It seems obvious that something

that has properties is *eo ipso* distinct from them. But on another way of thinking, DDS makes a good deal of sense. How could God, the absolute, self-sufficient reality, be just one more wise individual even if the wisest? God is better thought of as the source of all wisdom, as Wisdom itself in its prime instance. Otherwise, God would be dependent on something other than himself for his wisdom, namely, the property of being wise. As Mann points out, the Platonic approach to DDS as we find it in the Augustinian and Anselmian accounts leads to difficulties. Here are two:

D1. If God = wisdom, and God = life, then wisdom = life. But wisdom and life are not even extensionally equivalent, let alone identical. If Tom is alive, it doesn't follow that Tom is wise (23).

D2. If God is wisdom, and Socrates is wise by participating in wisdom, then Socrates is wise by participating in God. But this smacks of heresy. No creature participates in God (23).

*Property Instances.* Enter property instances. It is one thing to say that God is wisdom, quite another to say that God is God's wisdom. God's wisdom is an example of a property instance. And similarly for the other divine attributes. God is not identical to life; God is identical to *his* life. Suppose we say that God = God's wisdom, and God = God's life. It would then follow that God's wisdom = God's life, but not that God = wisdom or that wisdom = life.

So if we construe identity with properties as identity with property instances, then we can evade both of (D1) and (D2). Mann's idea, then, is that the identity claims made within DDS should be taken as Deity-instance identities (e.g., God is his omniscience) and as instance-instance identities (e.g., God's omniscience is God's omnipotence), but not as Deity-property identities (e.g., God is omniscience) or as property-property identities (e.g., omniscience is omnipotence). Support for Mann's approach is readily available in the texts of the *doctor angelicus* (24). Aquinas says things like, *Deus est sua bonitas*, "God is his goodness."

But what exactly is a property instance? If the concrete individual Socrates instantiates the abstract property wisdom, then two further putative items come into consideration. One is the (Chisholmian-Plantingian as opposed to Bergmannian-Armstrongian) state of affairs, *Socrates's being wise*. Such items are abstract, i.e., not in space or time. The other is the property instance, the wisdom of Socrates. Mann rightly holds that they are distinct. All abstract states of affairs exist, but only some of them obtain or are actual. By contrast, all property instances are actual: they cannot exist without being actual. The wisdom of Socrates is a particular, an unrepeatable item, just as Socrates is, and the wisdom of Socrates is concrete (in space and/or time) just as Socrates is. If we admit property instances into our ontology, then the above two difficulties can be circumvented. Or so Mann maintains.

*Could a Person be a Property Instance?* But then other problems loom. One is this. If the F-ness of God = God, if, for example, the wisdom of God

= God, then God is a property instance. But God is a person. From the frying pan into the fire? How could a person be a property instance? The problem displayed as an inconsistent triad:

- a. God is a property instance.
- b. God is a person.
- c. No person is a property instance.

Mann solves the triad by denying (c) (37). Some persons are property instances. Indeed, Mann argues that every person is a property instance because everything is a property instance (38). God is a person and therefore a property instance. If you object that persons are concrete while property instances are abstract, Mann's response is that both are concrete (37). To be concrete is to be in space and/or time. Socrates is concrete in this sense, but so is his being sunburned.

If you object that persons are substances and thus independent items while property instances are not substances but dependent on substances, Mann's response will be that the point holds for accidental property instances but not for essential property instances. Socrates may lose his wisdom but he cannot lose his humanity. Now all of God's properties are essential: God is essentially omniscient, omnipotent, etc. So it seems to Mann that "the omniscience of God is not any more dependent on God than God is on the omniscience of God: should either cease to be, the other would also" (37). This is scarcely compelling:  $x$  can depend on  $y$  even if both are necessary beings. Both the set whose sole member is the number 7 and the number 7 itself are necessary beings, but the set depends on its member both for its existence and its necessity, and not vice versa. Closer to home, Aquinas held that some necessary beings have their necessity from another while one has its necessity in itself. I should think that the omniscience of God is dependent on God, and not vice versa. Mann's view, however, is not unreasonable. Intuitions vary.

Mann's argument for the thesis that everything is a property instance involves the notion of a rich property. The rich property of an individual  $x$  is a conjunctive property the conjuncts of which are all and only the essential and accidental properties, some of them temporally indexed, instantiated by  $x$  throughout  $x$ 's career (38). Mann tells us that for anything whatsoever there is a corresponding rich property. From this he concludes that "everything is a property instance of some rich property or other" (38). It follows that every person is a property instance. The argument seems to be this:

- A. For every concrete individual  $x$ , there is a corresponding rich property  $R$ . Therefore,
- B. For every concrete individual  $x$ ,  $x$  is a property instance of some rich property or other. Therefore,

- C. For every concrete individual  $x$ , if  $x$  is a person, then  $x$  is a property instance.

I am having difficulty understanding this argument. The move from (A) to (B) smacks of a *non sequitur* absent some auxiliary premise. I grant *arguendo* that for each concrete individual  $x$  there is a corresponding rich property R. And I grant that there are property instances. Thus I grant that, in addition to Socrates and wisdom, there is the wisdom of Socrates. Recall that this property instance is not to be confused with the abstract state of affairs, *Socrates's being wise*. From what I have granted it follows that for each  $x$  there is the rich property instance, the R-ness of  $x$ . But how is it supposed to follow that everything is a property instance? Everything instantiates properties, and in this sense everything is an instance of properties; but this is not to say that everything is a property instance. Socrates instantiates a rich property, and so is an instance of a property, but it doesn't follow that Socrates is a property instance. Something is missing in Mann's argument. Either that, or I am missing something.

There is of course no chance that Mann is confusing being an instance of a property with being a property instance. If  $a$  instantiates F-ness, then  $a$  is an instance of the property F-ness; but  $a$  is not a property instance as philosophers use this phrase: *the F-ness of a* is a property instance. So what do we have to add to Mann's argument for it to generate the conclusion that every concrete individual is a property instance? How do we validate the inferential move from (A) to (B)? Let "Rs" stand for Socrates's rich property. We have to add the claim that there is nothing one could point to that could distinguish Socrates from the property instance generated when Socrates instantiates Rs. Rich property instances are a special case of property instances. Socrates cannot be identical to his wisdom because he can exist even if his wisdom does not exist. And he cannot be identical to his humanity because there is more to Socrates than his humanity, even though he cannot exist without it. But since Socrates's rich property instance includes all his property instances, why can't Socrates be identical to this rich property instance? And so Mann's thought seems to be that there is nothing that could distinguish Socrates from his rich property instance. So they are identical. And likewise for every other individual. But I think this is mistaken. Consequently, I think it is a mistake to hold that every person is a property instance. I give three arguments.

*Rich Properties and Haecceity Properties.* Socrates can exist without his rich property; ergo, he can exist without his rich property instance; ergo, Socrates cannot be a rich property instance or any property instance. The truth of the initial premise is fallout from the definition of "rich property." The R of  $x$  is a conjunctive property each conjunct of which is a property of  $x$ . Thus Socrates's rich property includes (has as a conjunct) the property of being married to Xanthippe. But Socrates might not have had that property, whence it follows that he might not have had R. (If R has C as a conjunct, then necessarily R has C as a conjunct, which implies that R cannot be what it is without having exactly the conjuncts it in fact has.



An analog of mereological essentialism holds for conjunctive properties.) And because Socrates might not have had R, he might not have had the property instance of R. So Socrates cannot be identical to this property instance.

What Mann needs is not a rich property, but an haecceity property: one that individuates Socrates across every possible world in which he exists. His rich property, by contrast, individuates him in only the actual world. In different worlds, Socrates has different rich properties. And in different worlds, Socrates has different rich property instances. It follows that Socrates cannot be identical to, or even necessarily equivalent to, any rich property instance. An haecceity property, however, is a property Socrates has in every world in which he exists, and which he alone has in every world in which he exists. Now if there are such haecceity properties as identity-with-Socrates, then perhaps we can say that Socrates is identical to a property instance, namely, the identity-with-Socrates of Socrates. Unfortunately, there are no haecceity properties as I and others have argued (William F. Vallicella, *A Paradigm Theory of Existence* [Kluwer, 2002], 99–104; see also Hugh J. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* [Indiana University Press, 2012], 86–87 and my review of this book, “Hugh McCann on the Implications of Divine Sovereignty,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 [2014]:149–161). So I conclude that concrete individuals cannot be identified with property instances, whence follows the perhaps obvious proposition that no person is a property instance, not God, not me, not Socrates.

*The Revenge of Max Black.* Suppose we revisit Max Black’s indiscernible iron spheres (“The Identity of Indiscernibles,” *Mind* 61 [1952]: 153–164). There are exactly two of them, and nothing else, and they share all monadic and relational properties. (Thus both are made of iron and each is ten meters from an iron sphere.) There are no properties to distinguish them, and of course there are no haecceity properties. So the rich property of the one is the same as the rich property of the other. It follows that the rich property instance of the one is identical to the rich property instance of the other. But there are two spheres, not one. It follows that neither sphere is identical to its rich property instance. So again I conclude that individuals are not rich property instances.

If you tell me that the property instances are numerically distinct because the spheres are numerically distinct, then you presuppose that individuals are not rich property instances. You presuppose a distinction between an individual and its rich property instance. This second argument assumes that Black’s world is metaphysically possible and thus that the Identity of Indiscernibles is not metaphysically necessary. A reasonable assumption!

*The Revenge of Josiah Royce.* Suppose Phil is my indiscernible twin. Now it is a fact that I love myself. But if I love myself in virtue of my instantiation of a set of properties, then I should love Phil equally. For he instantiates exactly the same properties as I do. But if one of us has to be annihilated,



then I prefer that it be Phil. Suppose God decides that one of us is more than enough, and that one of us has to go. I say, "Let it be Phil!" and Phil says, "Let it be Bill!" So I don't love Phil equally even though he has all the same properties that I have. I prefer myself and love myself just because I am myself. My Being exceeds my being a rich property instance.

This little thought-experiment suggests that there is more to self-love than love of the being-instantiated of an ensemble of properties. For Phil and I have the same properties, and yet each is willing to sacrifice the other. This would make no sense if the Being of each of us were exhausted by our being instances of sets of properties. In other words, I do not love myself solely as an instance of properties but also as a unique existent individual who cannot be reduced to a mere instance of properties. I love myself as a unique individual. And the same goes for Phil: he loves himself as a unique individual. Each of us loves himself as a unique individual numerically distinct from his indiscernible twin.

Classical theism is a personalism: God is a person and we, as made in the image and likeness of God, are also persons. God keeps us in existence by knowing us and loving us. God is absolutely unique and each of us is unique as, and only as, the object of divine love. The divine love penetrates to the very ipseity and haecceity of me and my indiscernible twin, Phil. God loves us as individuals, as essentially unique. (See Josiah Royce's Ingersoll Lecture of 1899, published as *The Conception of Immortality* [Glenwood Press, 1968]). But this is not possible if we are reducible to rich property instances. I detect a tension between the personalism of classical theism and the view that persons are property instances.

*The Dialectic in Review.* One of the entailments of DDS is that God is identical to his attributes, such defining properties as omniscience, omnipotence, etc. This view has its difficulties, so Mann takes a different tack: God is identical to his property instances. This implies that God is a property instance. But God is a person and it is not clear how a person could be a property instance. Mann takes the bull by the horns by boldly arguing that every concrete individual is a property instance—a rich property instance—and that therefore every person is a property instance, including God. The argument was found to be unconvincing for the three reasons given. Mann's problems stem from an attempt to adhere to a non-constituent ontology in explication of a doctrine that was developed within, and presumably only makes sense within, a constituent ontology. Too much indebted to A. Plantinga's important but wrong-headed critique of DDS in *Does God Have a Nature?* (Marquette University Press, 1980), Mann thinks that a shift to property instances will save the day while remaining within Plantinga's nonconstituent ontological framework. (See §3 of my Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, "Divine Simplicity": <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/#ConVerNonOnt.>) But God can no more be identical to a concrete property instance than he can to an abstract property.